

the “co-unter worker”

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It's all about subsistence

– not about competition about jobs and increased exploitation

The explicit General Motors's programme in week 200436 about the plants in Rüsselsheim (Opel in Germany) and Trollhättan (SAAB in Sweden) and the underbidding when it comes to sending classmates to unemployment, is only about speaking out clearly what is always an imperative with the competition between plants and workers' collectives. A competition that is most fierce *within* the major companies.

If GM is sincere about closing either one of the present plants and centralize production to the remaining one, then the decision is already made. With this decision, Trollhättan is most probably the loosing part, with its distance from the European chains of production and markets, and its relative smallness. This is so, whether the Swedish Metall (the metal workers' union) is offering lower wages and longer working time or not.

The most certain motive for GM is to let both plants present programmes for future increase in exploitation of the workers, with increased speed, reorganization of work processes and organization *plus* longer working time without corresponding increase of wages. With this rationalization planned, and to be accomplished by the local union and plant management, GM will be stronger off, no matter if they will close either of the plants, or not.

The background, apart from the always-overarching motive to get fewer workers to produce more for less payment, is the extremely fierce competition on the automotive market. They talk about an approximately 30% over capacity of production for the total automotive capital relative to the world wide demand.

The union strategy – crisis management

The union policy at present is 1) to sign a common protest appeal among the Swedish Metall union, the German IG Metall and the EMF (the European Metalworkers Federation) against GM playing off the two plants against each other;

2) to put their faith in GM considering "strict business economy", whatever that may be, and that a "Swedish solution" then is "very well at hand" (according to the local union official in Trollhättan, Paul Åkerlund); and

3) to let plants close and workers get fired, and instead emphasize the need for "restructuring", with new jobs created with new techniques "on behalf of other jobs". The price to be paid by the workers is to be balanced off by a good "unemployment insurance and an active labour market policy" (the Metall union president, Göran Johnsson, in the union paper *Dagens Arbete* (Labour Today)). Beside this, the same Göran informs us that "those who loose this automobile production most probably will get some other production".

Göteborg and the transmission plant

The SAAB factory in Göteborg has for a long time been under the same threat, however less explicitly. This threat was even more acute when the transmission plant changed from belonging to SAAB to be part of a GM-Fiat joint venture about gearboxes and motoring. The motive for the joint venture was from the start to play off the 17 factories in action in Europe against each other by stressing that the 17 factories were at least 3 or 4 to many – without mentioning which was to be superfluous.

– It was obvious from the start that the bosses wanted to increase competition between the plants, that is the workers, by implementing streamlining and rationalizations – in the end to increase the exploitation of the workers, says one worker in Göteborg.

– Both the union and the management talk about "we in Sweden this, and we in Sweden that". "If only we improve quality, write more improvement suggestions (i.e. kaizen, transl. note), reconsider when we are about to call in sick, etc" then the plant will remain. They suggest that if only we are *willing*, and make some *efforts*, it will work. But the new gearbox got screwed, the production of that went to Rüsselsheim (!), despite that they told us that "we" were cheaper and produced better quality. I mean, how reliable is it when the bosses are appealing to our – yeah, our – willing at the same time as they let in Italian "brass" (the wankers wearing ties, transl. note) to measure our machines?

Struggle for subsistence, and for better jobs

When GM decides – whether it will be Trollhättan or Rüsselsheim – it is up to the

workers to *fight*. If they close either plant, to secure what ever there is to secure – that is subsistence. In the end that is what it is all about – as it is said, if they want loyalty, they can buy a dog. Demand, say, 5 years of wages and paid retraining. If GM won't pay, demand it from the state. If the state won't pay, demand it from the union – in the end it is to them we are paying our money every month, year in and year out. If Göran Persson (the Prime Minister of Sweden, transl. note) want to contribute with some billions (SEK, transl. note) for a motor-way project to Trollhättan, that will take longer time than the next threat of closure, then fuck the asphalt, give the money to the workers of Trollhättan.

If they continue production, there is the need to refuse worsening of work conditions and environment. It is no solution to let them have your little finger, since they, like all capitalists, are not satisfied until they get whole your body *and* soul. You can, just the same, say No today.

– If they want to close today or in three years, it doesn't matter how much – *or little!* – we agree to do. We can just as well approach them today and demand the only thing that counts in society – cash money. They can take their jobs and shove 'em, if they only want to get us to work harder for less money. And in the end, they will fire us one after the other, instead of all collectively. Remember the 70 workers (at SAAB in Gothenburg, transl. note) that got fired last spring – with no thank you's what so ever). The day before they were about to leave, some, well selected, of them got the offer to stay until the summer vacation, however not with a permanent contract. The management even got workers from Södertälje (the SAAB motor factory south of Stockholm, transl. note) to work for the just fired Göteborg workers! In France workers threatened to blow up their closed factory, and got well more money than the legal system allowed them, says the same Göteborg worker.

– 5 years' wages, that would do a "good unemployment insurance", to use the words of Göran Johnsson. And keep holding our heads high.

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